PANDION HALIAËTUS.

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Osprey.

- Falco haliaëtus*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 22.
—— *piscator*, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 361.
—— *arundinaceus*, Gmel. ed. Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 263.
Pandion haliaëtus, Cuv. Regn. Anim., edit. 1817, tom. i. p. 316.
—— *fluviatilis*, Savig. Descr. de l'Égypte, Hist. Nat., tom. i. p. 96.
—— *ichthyaëtus*, Kaup, Classif. der Säug. und Vög., p. 122.
—— *alticeps*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., tom. i. p. 33.
—— *planiceps*, Brehm, ib., tab. 2. fig. 3.
—— *indicus*, Hodgs. Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., 1837, p. 366.
Aquila haliaëtus, Meyer, Taschenb. Deutsch. Vög., tom. i. p. 23.
—— *balbuzardus*, Dum. Dict. des Sci. Nat., tom. i. p. 351.
Accipiter haliaëtus, Pall. Zoog. Ross.-Asiat., tom. i. p. 355.
Balbusardus haliaëtus, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 51.
Triorches fluviatilis, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus. p. 10.
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NOTWITHSTANDING the persecution to which this interesting bird has been subjected, especially of late years, a persecution so unrelenting that it has almost amounted to its extirpation from the British Islands, the Osprey still forms a part of their avifauna, especially of that portion of them denominated Scotland, and will ever remain associated with the fine lochs and deserted castles of that country. At the head of that queen of Scottish lochs, Assynt, there still stands the crumbling castle of Ardvreck; but no longer does the Osprey come to it in spring, rear its young on its turrets, and again depart in the autumn; no longer does the Fish-hawk circle over that fine sheet of water; no longer can the tourist have the pleasure of seeing the Fishing Eagle hovering over a trout, or witness its unerring stoop; no longer need he direct his glass towards the highest tower of the fine old castle, for the eyry of the Osprey is no longer there, the last pair having been ruthlessly killed about 1860; so says Mr. Sutherland, the landlord of the Tourist's Inn. The same remarks apply with equal force to many, if not to all the other Lochs, the neighbourhood of which was formerly the Osprey's summer home. Lochs Lomond, Maree, Awe, and Loch Fyne, with its ruined castle of Dunderaw, have lost their summer visitant, and their waters are no longer disturbed by the plunge of the Leaden Eagle, as it is sometimes termed. How much do I regret to write in this strain respecting one of the finest of our indigenous birds! but change in the destiny of birds as well as of man appears to be one of nature's laws. My readers may here naturally ask, Well, then, what other countries does the bird inhabit? This is a question not easily answered; for naturalists are divided in opinion as to whether there is one, two, or three species of this particular form, individuals of which are so universally distributed over the globe that there are few countries wherein they are not found. From Europe to the Cape of Good Hope, from India to the southern limit of Australia, and in most of the temperate portions of America north of the line, Ospreys, either identical with or nearly allied to our own, are as plentiful as they used to be in Scotland. In the absence of castles and ruined buildings, they take up their abode on rocky promontories, the giant branches of old trees bordering the bays and larger inlets of the seas, and in rocky islands in the centres of lakes and lagoons. There, as with us, they construct a large nest in the midst of a platform of sticks and herbage, deposit two beautifully blotched eggs, hatch and bring up their young, just as they would do here.

It must be understood that the forcible expressions I have employed respecting the destruction of the Osprey have special reference to the bird in its former breeding-haunts in Scotland during the months of summer; for the Osprey is still frequently seen during autumn in many parts of Britain, and on most of our larger rivers and sheets of water from north to south; but these are probably birds of the year which have been bred in Norway or some part of the Continent, and driven out of their proper track during their southern migration. Such birds are easily recognizable by having the feathers of the upper surface more lanceolate in form than in the adult, and margined all round with white.

The Duke of Argyll, in a note to me dated June 13, 1863, says:—

“I was much interested by seeing a fine Osprey the other day, hawking over the Dee, near Balmoral. I had never seen this bird alive before, so rare has it now become in Scotland. His hovering, Kestrel-like, over the pools of the river was very peculiar; but the movement or, rather, the cessation of movement was

much less gracefully performed than in the case of the Kestrel, the wings having rather a heavy flapping motion. I saw it make a descent into the bed of the river, which was well and quickly done; but bushes concealed the surface of the stream, and, if the bird touched the water, I did not see it; it rose, apparently without a fish. It was interrupted by a Heron coming from a great height in the air, screaming round it with outstretched neck, and every sign of indignation and alarm. The Osprey wheeled up in spiral circles to get above the Heron, and then soared off across the hills towards the valley of the Don. It appeared to examine carefully a bit of moor over which it passed, but did not hover."

Mr. St. John, in his Tour in Sutherlandshire, says, "I generally saw the Osprey fishing about the lower pools of the rivers, near their mouths; and a beautiful sight it is. The long-winged bird hovers (as a Kestrel does over a mouse) at a considerable distance above the water, sometimes on perfectly motionless wings, and sometimes wheeling slowly in circles, turning her head and looking eagerly down at the water; she sees a trout when at a great height, and, suddenly closing her wings, drops like a shot bird into the water, but seldom failing to rise again with a good-sized fish in her talons. The feet of the Osprey are extremely rough, and the toes placed in a peculiar manner, so as to give the best possible chance of holding her slippery prey. Sometimes in the midst of her swoop the Osprey suddenly stops herself in the most abrupt manner, probably because the fish, having changed its position, is no longer within her range; she then hovers again stationary in the air, anxiously looking below for the reappearance of her prey. Having well examined one pool, she suddenly turns off, and with rapid flight takes herself to an adjoining part of the stream, where she again begins to hover and circle in the air. On making a pounce into the water, the Osprey dashes the spray up far and wide, so as to be seen for a considerable distance."

The late Mr. Wolley sent the following note to Mr. Hewitson:—"I have seen several nests of the Osprey upon the highest points of ruins in and about lochs in Scotland, and several more upon small isolated rocks projecting out of the water. There is something in the general appearance of the nest which reminds one of those of the wood-ants: it is usually in the form of a truncated cone; the sticks project very slightly beyond the sides, and are built up with turf and other materials; the summit is of moss, very flat and even, and the cavity occupies a comparatively small part of it. I know no other nest at all like it. The birds are very constant year after year in returning to their old stations; and, even after one or both birds have been killed in the previous season, I have frequently seen individuals flying near the now deserted eyry."—*Col. Ill. of Eggs of Brit. Birds*, 3rd edit., vol. i. p. 19.

St. John describes a nest built in a birch-tree, so near the ground that he could see it without climbing. It consisted of a perfect cartload of sticks, varying from the size of a very stout walking-stick to the twigs of birch and heather of which the inner part of the fabric was composed. He did not measure it; but, as near as he could guess, it was not less than eight feet in length and nearly four in width; the depth, too, was very great; the inner lining was composed of a coarse kind of grass.

Mr. Hewitson says, the eggs are laid in the beginning of May, and are sometimes two, but almost always three in number. They are more oval in form than those of any other of our British Falconidæ, and do not differ much. He has represented the eggs with a pinky cream-coloured ground, covered with numerous large and small patches of chestnut-red and black, the smaller spots appearing as if beneath the surface.

Lord Lilford informs me that a pair of this species had a nest with young on the Mediterranean side of the Rock of Gibraltar, in June 1869; and with a good glass, he could easily make out the young birds in the nest, from the battery at the so-called Monkey's Cave; he further states that the Osprey is common on the shores of the Lake of Geneva during its vernal migration, and adds:—"We generally have one of this species, for a few days in August or September, haunting the lochs at Gaick, Inverness-shire."

Numerous notes on this bird, as seen in various parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia, will be found in 'The Ibis,' to which I must refer my readers, as they are too lengthy for transcription here.

The front figure in the Plate represents a bird, about half the natural size, with a Scottish Trout (*Salmo fario*) in its talons, from a sketch by Mr. Wolf.

Gould, John. 1873. "Osprey, *Pandion haliaëtus* [Pl. 5]." *The birds of Great Britain* 1, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323788>.

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